DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 612 SO 030 269

AUTHOR	Kurz, Gerhard
TITLE	The Great Drama: Germany and the French Revolution.
INSTITUTION	Inter Nationes, Bonn (West Germany).
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	60p.; Photographs and illustrations may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Art; *European History; Foreign Countries; Foreign Culture; *Intellectual History; Philosophy; World History
IDENTIFIERS	France; *French Revolution; *German History; Germany

ABSTRACT

Revolution did not spread to Germany from France at the end of the 18th century, yet the German and other European states were forced to come to terms with the principles of the French Revolution such as political and legal freedoms and national unity. Germany was affected by the French Revolution particularly by the reactions of German intellectuals of the time, including Goethe, Kant, and Hegel. The writings of Germans who traveled in France during the Revolution; the effect the Revolution had on political discourse and philosophical ideas; and the great German classicism and romanticism works of art are discussed. Over 30 photographs appear in this volume, and a selected 10-item bibliography of German resources also is included. (DB)

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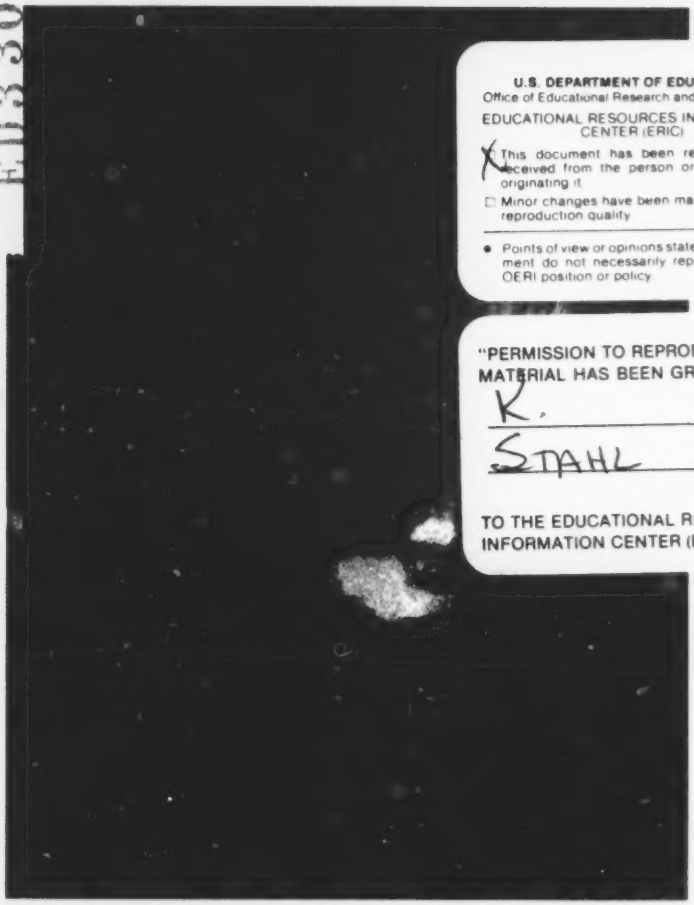
The Great Drama



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Germany and the French Revolution

Inter Nationes

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Siege of the City of Mainz, 1793. Aquatint drawing
by L.F. Tielker after a painting by I.G. Schütz
(Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin/West)

The Great Drama

Germany
and the
French Revolution

by
Gerhard Kurz

Inter Nationes, Bonn 1989

About the author

Gerhard Kurz, born 1943
1963–1970 Studied German, philosophy and history in Heidelberg
1970 Graduation. Appointed as Assistant Professor at the Institute of German Studies of the University of Düsseldorf
1973 Doctorate with a thesis on Hölderlin's work
1980 Habilitation with a monograph on Kafka's work
Since 1980 Professor for German Language and Literature at the University of Amsterdam
Since 1984 Professor for General Literary Studies and Recent German Literary History at the Justus Liebig University of Giessen
Kurz has published books and articles on the Enlightenment, Classicism, Romanticism, modern literature and literary theory.
He is co-editor of the "Hölderlin-Jahrbuch" and the periodical "Sprache und Literatur", and is vice-president of the Hölderlin Society.

Translation: Robert Elsie

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Layout: Stefan Röhl
Printing: Fieseler Druck GmbH, Meckenheim
Printed in the Federal Republic of Germany

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The Political Situation

The French revolution not only reversed political and social relations in France, it transformed all of Europe.

France developed from the ancien régime into a State with a civil code and a constitution. All subsequent developments and upheavals, however, as a rule preserved that which was attained in the initial stage, i.e. the liberal constitutional phase of the revolution: the abolition of class privileges, the separation of Church and State, the constitutional guarantee of personal freedom and the legal equality of property.

The dynamics of the domestic revolutionary process and wars abroad at the same time which were conducted for the defence of the revolution and for patriotic integration resulted in an ambivalent political course of expansion of power and liberation which ripped apart the political and social texture of the ancien régime in Europe.

The German States collapsed under the pressure of expansive French policies. The Holy Roman Empire expired in 1806. Redistribution of territories under the mediation of the Imperial Knights and Imperial Cities and the secularization of church principalities and property completely transformed the governmental and political structures of the Empire. These changes, together with Prussia's defeat in 1806-07, forced the introduction of political and social reforms. The French revolution and expansion of France also brought about a nationalisation of political awareness, not only in France but also in neighbouring countries.

In order to resist revolutionary France, both the German and other European States were forced to come to terms with the principles of the French revolution such as political and legal freedoms and national unity. These dramatic changes could not be rescinded at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 either which sought to restore the ancien régime. The significance of the momentous transformation

① The Congress of Vienna
Engraving by Joh. Godefroy after a painting by J. B. Isabey, 1819

which took place around 1800 can be defined as a configuration of revolution, reform and restoration.

The revolution rendered German society very political and brought about a splitting and polarization into various political and ideological factions, though such a tendancy could already be seen before 1789.

The Enlightenment and its political consequences had already led to conservative currents before the revolution which in part were transformed into more radically reactionary currents after the revolution. This polarization was based among other things on a hysterical fear that the Jacobins were at work everywhere, scheming and plotting. Some representatives of the Enlightenment did indeed turn into "Jacobins", as their opponents called them. These "Jacobins" who regarded revolution by force in Germany as a necessity constituted nonetheless an insignificant minority compared to reformist and conservative forces. The overwhelming majority in German society during the Age of the Enlightenment advocated a liberal society. There also arose, however, elements of

reformist conservatives and radical reformists in this society, the former to the right of centre and the latter to the left.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten" (Conversations of German Emigrants) of 1795 contains a brilliant analysis of the political and ideological situation which arose after the revolution.

In the broad story-line of the work, these conversations of emigrants deal with an aristocratic family and its friends who fled the victorious French revolutionary army in 1793 from their lands on the left bank of the Rhine to their property on the right bank. The characters embody the whole political spectrum: cousin Karl is an

Ⓒ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Copperplate print after a chalk drawing by J.H. Lips, 1791

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enthusiastic advocate of the revolution, the steward secretly agrees with him, whereas an elderly cleric secretly disagrees. The old privy councillor is an impulsive defender of the ancien régime.

Their political conversations intensify as a result of the impending defeat of republican Mainz. The Baroness urges composure and a 'standstill'. Karl and the privy councillor enter into a more and more acute conflict. In the end, both advocate terror as a means of achieving their revolutionary and reactionary aims. Civil war reigns in words.

The Baroness qualifies this dispute as a mirror of the revolutionary events. The two figures are criticized for their historical one-sidedness: Karl for negating tradition, the privy councillor for negating modernity. The two characters embody revolution and restoration as historical accomplices. The dispute ends when the privy councillor leaves the group. Karl remains. He excuses himself for his rashness. This signifies that the achievements of the bourgeois revolution cannot be undone; restoration cannot solve political and social problems. The privy councillor is, nonetheless, not characterized negatively for he expresses in his somewhat distorted manner an elementary need for historical continuity. The new 'social' society must guarantee both: the achievements of the bourgeois revolution and the need for historical continuity.

Goethe supported a reformist conservative position similar to that of Friedrich von Gentz and August Rehberg who followed not the French revolution but the struggle for American independence which they did not regard as a break with history.

«Them and not Us»

The French revolution completely fascinated educated Germans. Large numbers of German middle-class intellectuals and aristocrats were indeed enthusiastic about the revolution in neighbouring France. This enthusiasm was no coincidence. The end of the 18th century saw an intensive debate about reform in which questions of human rights, freedom and equality were openly discussed as regulative political principles, as were the separation of powers and the legitimation of rule. The public character of such a discussion was the prerequiste for stimulating political awareness among larger sections of the population. Writers in particular thought of themselves, as the Swabian journalist Ludwig Wekhrlin put it, as the 'born advocates of humanity' in this discussion on changing society, which they regarded as a necessity. Some advocated patriotism and loyalty to the empire and traditional class freedoms against modern absolutism, whereas others regarded absolute monarchy under an enlightened ruler as the best means of improving the country and society by education and legislation, and of finally transforming absolutism into constitutionalism. They pointed to the many examples of generally acknowledged enlightened rulers predisposed to reform.

Educated Germans were convinced that the revolution concerned not just France but all humanity. They regarded revolution as the triumph of reason and as the implementation of human rights. Friedrich von Gentz who was soon to become a strong opponent of the revolution wrote at the end of 1790, "I would consider the failure of the revolution one of the hardest experiences mankind has ever gone through. It is the first practical triumph of philosophy, the first example of a government based on principles and on a coherent and consequent system." The elderly Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, on hearing of the convening of the Estates General regarded himself lucky to be alive to experience the event. His ode "Sie und nicht wir" (Them and not Us) written in 1790 and dedicat-

⑤ Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock
Steelplate print by E. Müller after a drawing by G. Hardorff

ed to La Rochefoucauld begins with the verse: "Had I a hundred voices, I would celebrate Gaul's freedom". In the same year Christoph Martin Wieland regarded it as a "felicitous occurrence for which generations to come will envy us because we are contemporaries and spectators of the greatest and most fascinating of all dramas ever to have been played on earth." And Hegel who is said on every anniversary of the storming of the Bastille to have raised his glass to the revolution, evoked the 'mythe solaire' of the revolution when he wrote in retrospect, "It was indeed a great dawning. All thinking beings celebrated this era. A lofty sentiment held sway at that time, an enthusiasm of the intellect penetrated the world as if the first real Day of Atonement between the Godhead and Mankind had come to pass."

Most partisans of the revolution were shocked by the execution of the king and the Jacobin terror of 1793. Many of them, like Klopstock and Wieland, turned away from the revolution. Friedrich Hölderlin spoke of the "Jacobin disgrace to the people" and cele-

② Christoph Martin Wieland
Contemporary copperplate print

brated the assassination of Marat, as did many others. His support went to the Girondists. In his novel "Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland" (Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece) (1797-99), he sharply criticized the revolutionary policies of terror. Anyone attempting to transform the State into a 'school of ethics', as Robespierre had, would end in terrorist violence: "That man tried to transform the State int his heaven has made it his hell." In his "Phänomenologie des Geistes" (Phenomenology of Mind) of 1806, Hegel apostrophized Jacobin terror as the hour of death. "It was the coldest and most trivial death ever known, with no more significance than the slicing of a head of cabbage or a sip of water." 1793 marked a turning point in the revolution's effect on Germany.

The Great Drama of the Revolution

Wieland's quotation about the "greatest and most fascinating of all dramas ever to have been played on earth" equating the revolution with a play, had many notable parallels in German reactions to the events in France. This metaphor can be interpreted from its many different aspects. Those describing the revolution as a 'drama' or 'play' define themselves as spectators and not as actors in the play. They watch from a distance and at the same time are affected like spectators at a play who are upset or moved by the drama or who, as Hegel stated, are seized by a 'sublime sentiment'.

In contrast to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which history was regarded primarily from a theological perspective as a 'drama' or 'stage' of events, the revolution was experienced as an overwhelming act of history itself to which mankind was subjected. It was like an act of the forces of nature. In view of the sublime nature of the drama, the spectator experienced his own impotence and greatness, as well as his destiny as a free man. French revolutionaries thus viewed the resolutions of the National Assembly as a sublime 'spectacle' of mankind.

The 'drama' metaphor also applies to the staging of the revolution since the revolution was staged like a play of world history accompanied by many festivities and ceremonies.

In his travel journal published in 1791 "Blicke auf einen Teil Deutschlands, der Schweiz und Frankreichs bei einer Reise vom Jahre 1790" (A look at one part of Germany, Switzerland and France on a journey in 1790) Gerhard Anton von Halem wrote: "What has the history of humanity had to offer up to now in comparison with the drama presently being staged for us in Gaul? . . . This unique moment was reserved for us who are living in the second half of the eighteenth century. We have seen the preparations for the staging and have seen the production."

And those who identified with the actors and spoke of 'us' when

© Georg Forster
After a painting by J.H.W. Tischbein

they meant 'them' regarded the revolution as an act of the forces of nature out of control. In his "Parisische Umrisse" (Parisian Outlines) written in Paris in 1794 a few months before his death, Georg Forster described the "drama of the revolution" as a "great drama of struggle and advancement". As very few of his contemporaries had done, Forster recognized the dynamic force of the 'sans culotte' in the revolution. It is not "pure intellect, not pure reason." He described the revolution as "the brute force of the masses," and further characterized its natural dynamics with the formula: "the revolution . . . is the revolution."

In 1798, Immanuel Kant published his treatise "Der Streit der Fakultäten" (The Quarrel of the Faculties). Kant wondered what historical events or experiences would allow the conclusion that human kind possesses a moral aptitude and that progress is in general being made "for the better".

In Kant's view, this event could not be the revolution itself but the "way of thinking of the spectators which becomes evident in this drama of great transformations." Referring in public to this way of

⑥ **Immanuel Kant**
Lithography after a drawing by Dobler

thinking could, however, be dangerous. Kant himself was taken to task by the Prussian Government.

In accordance with the theory of drama during the Age of Enlightenment, importance is focussed on the effect of the revolution as a play. Kant's view was that the effect was not to be found in the repetition of revolution in Germany but in participation according to one's wishes: "The revolution of an intelligent nation which we have been observing in our times may succeed or fail. It may be filled with suffering and acts of barbarism to such an extent that a well

meaning individual would never decide to repeat the experiment at such costs even if he might hope to succeed in his second enterprise – this revolution, I say, does nevertheless find in the heart of all spectators who are not involved in the spectacle themselves a desire for participation that borders on enthusiasm and that, since its manifestation is dangerous, can have no other cause than a moral disposition in the human race."

The play and the spectators "participating according to their wishes". These wishes were not yet a reality and were not to become a reality. The German spectator kept his distance because his reality was different.

Travelling to the Revolution

Paris, the capital of the revolution, attracted people from all over Europe who wished to experience the drama of this upheaval with their own eyes and report on it. A new type of traveller arose: not a traveller to Paris but a traveller to the revolution. These travellers came for the most part from the upper bourgeoisie.

The reports of these travellers were read with great interest. They appeared in book form and many of them went through several editions or were published in newly founded journals which also reported extensively on the revolution, journals such as "Minerva" read by Hegel and Hölderlin, "Genius der Zeit" (Genius of the Times), the "Patriot", "Annalen der leidenden Menschheit" (Annals of Suffering Mankind) and the "Neue graue Ungeheuer" (New Grey Monster). These accounts of journeys disseminated a totally new picture of France, the characteristics of which were no longer frivolity and despotism but the triumph of human rights, of reason and of republican sentiment.

The oral and written reports of these travellers helped create a favourable opinion of the revolution. The insight gained by most of these travellers did, however, remain limited. Most of them saw only Paris; hardly any of them ventured into the provinces, and most visitors to Paris stayed for but a short period of time. Critical observers noted, too, that short-term visitors noticed only the triumphs of the victors.

Goethe, sceptical of the revolution, arrived in Düsseldorf at the end of 1792 on his return from Valmy where the Prussian army had suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the French revolutionary army that year. He was amazed that "a certain sentiment of freedom and a striving for democracy had spread to the upper classes. The convictions of the Germans," he reported, "are fluctuating strangely. Some of them were even in Paris and heard important

⑧ Page 18/19:
The Bastille, Paris
18th century etching by Neubauer

figures speak, saw them act and have been inspired, in their unfortunate German manner, to imitate them."

In 1798, Joachim Heinrich Campe, an enlightener and educator, travelled to Paris, enjoyed there the "theatrical funeral of French despotism" and wondered whether he was really in Paris and whether the 'new Greeks and new Romans' he saw around him had really been French a few weeks earlier. In the preface to his "Briefe aus Paris während der französischen Revolution geschrieben" (Letters written in Paris during the French revolution) he left no doubt that such a revolution was superfluous in Germany.

Among Campe's companions was Wilhelm von Humboldt, later language philosopher and the reformer of the Prussian educational system. Humboldt was more sceptical than Campe. Germany, he

⑦ Wilhelm von Humboldt
Drawing of the Hentschel brothers

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wrote to Campe in 1790, must be protected from such a crisis from which France has been suffering "in atonement for all of mankind".

Many Germans travelled to Paris, including Konrad Engelbert Oelsner, journalist, Johann Wilhelm Archenholtz, the publisher of 'Minerva', Count Gustav Schlabrendorff, Gerhard Anton von Halem, administrative official and writer, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, royal bandmaster, Wilhelm Ludwig Wekhrlin, writer who died in Paris, and August von Kotzebue, playwright and rabid opponent of the revolution, etc., etc.

The most prominent among these travellers was Georg Forster, one of the best known figures of German society in the Age of the Enlightenment. Together with Alexander von Humboldt, Forster travelled to England via the Netherlands in 1790 and returned via France. In 1791-1794, Forster's "Ansichten vom Niederrhein, von Brabant, Flandern, Holland, England und Frankreich" (Views from the Lower Rhine, Brabant, Flanders, Holland, England and France) was published. Alexander von Humboldt did not record his own impressions of his travels. The ideas of 1789, however, constituted a basis for his political thinking his whole life long.

Forster was the most prominent of the 'clubists', i.e. members of the Jacobin club in Mainz. Under the protection of the French army, the club had declared Mainz to be a republic in 1792-1793, the first German republic so to speak. The political objectives of the leading members of the club were, nevertheless, more in line with constitutional monarchy. The club had a relatively large membership. Most of the population, however, reacted passively and with reservations. This resulted in a number of compulsory measures amounting to terror such as obligatory oaths and compulsory voting.

Forster, who was nominated vice-president of the provisional administration, became convinced that the German people were not ready for revolution. In order to preserve that which had already been attained, he favoured the annexation of the territories on the left bank of the Rhine (Cisrhenania) by France. In 1793 he travelled to Paris as a deputy of the Rhineland German National Conven-

⑨ Republic of Mainz 1792/93: Meeting of the Jacobin club of Mainz
Copperplate print, 1796

tion. The advance of the coalition army later impeded his return to Germany. In the middle of 1793, the Prussian army conquered Mainz. With it were Goethe and Heinrich von Kleist, the latter as a lance-corporal.

Because of his membership in the Jacobin club of Mainz, Forster was denounced in Germany as a Jacobin. Friedrich Schlegel's work "Georg Forster, Fragment einer Charakteristik der deutschen Klassiker" (Georg Forster, Fragment of a Characteristic of the German Classics) was nevertheless a monument to him.

Die

Rechte des Menſchen

und des

Bürgers,

wie ſie die franzöſiſche konſtituirende National-verſammlung 1791 proklamirte,

mit

Erläuterungen

von

Georg Wedekind

Mitgliede des Nationalconvents der freien Deutſchen zu Mainz.

Mainz,

im zweiten Jahr der Freiheit und der Gleichheit 1793.

(19) Georg Christian Wedekind (Co-founder of the Jacobin club of Mainz). Cover of *"Die Rechte des Menschen und des Bürgers ..."* (*The rights of the individual and the citizen ...*), Mainz 1793

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The New Language

In the beginning the revolution was interpreted as the regeneration and restoration of an originally good system which had meanwhile become corrupt, i.e. initially not as a break with the past or as a new creation. The term 'the new Franks', often utilized in German texts, incorporates the concept of a renascence of a formerly good system. In the course of a quick succession of events the revolution then became increasingly felt as a break with the past. The introduction of the revolutionary calender eloquently documents this development. The bedazzling and confusing manifestations of the change were reflected in the many new terms of political jargon.

An important part of German political vocabulary derives from the political language of the time of the French revolution: the division of the political spectrum into left and right, concepts such as the citizen, representative of the people, majority, minority, aristocracy, monarchist, democrat, emigrant, bureaucracy, demagogy, reaction and propaganda. They were either formed as calques or given new meaning.

In Germany a large number of dictionaries of revolutionary language were published in which the new vocabulary was recorded and explained. For example, the treatise on the "Unbestand der Begriffe während der Revolution" (Variability of terms during the revolution), which was published in 1795, noted with reference to the change of meaning of the word patriot: "the term patriot which previously referred to an opponent of abuse in the old constitution has now been transferred to an opponent of monarchy." A patriot was now anyone who supported the republic. It must be noted here that the term republic could also refer to a constitutional monarchy with a separation of the judicial and the executive, and with the firm recognition of human and civil rights.

Revolution or Reform from Above

The great majority of Germans who supported the French revolution rejected the idea of revolution in Germany. The real Jacobins who were striving for a violent upheaval were but a small minority. The intellectual ruling class of bourgeoisie and aristocracy, of religious figures and officials tended rather to support reform from above. In this class, the memory of the terror of 1792-93, the execution of the king, not to mention French wars and conquests lingered on, leading to a critical attitude to events in France.

(1) Call by the French general Adam Custine for the overthrow of Landgraf Wilhelm IX of Hessen-Kassel
Copperplate print, 1793

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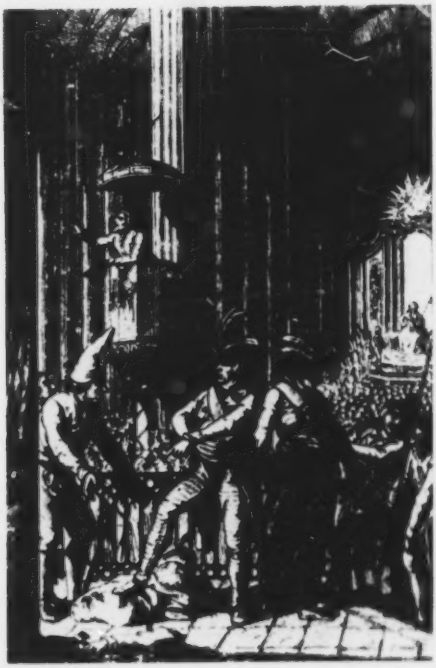
not, however, to a rejection of the early liberal constitutional phase of the revolution.

Though the federative structure of the German Empire was an impediment to revolution, it did not exclude revolutions completely, as could be seen in Italy. Nor was Germany spared this violent upheaval due to a lack of social tension and unrest.

There was social unrest on several occasions in the last two decades of the 18th century. The postulates of the French revolution exacerbated this tension. The new French symbols of political struggle were adopted. Cockades were worn, trees of liberty were planted, revolutionary clubs were founded and political agitation was carried out by literary means. The revolution itself had created



(2) The cathedral of Strasbourg as a "temple of reason"
Copperplate print, 1793

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⑪ Dance around the tree of liberty, symbol of general human rights
Contemporary painting, 1792/93

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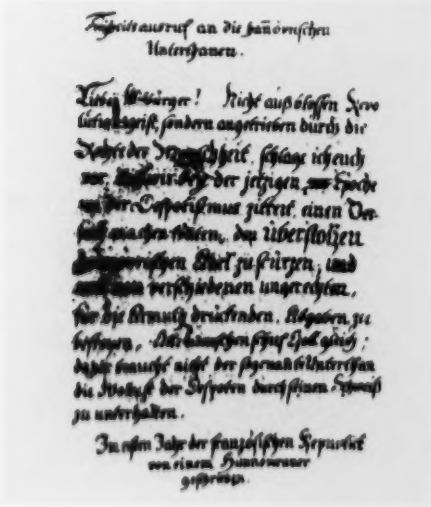
the social unrest. Revolutionary clubs such as that in Mainz were patronized primarily by wealthy and educated sections of the population.

Plans to set up southern German republics were abandoned after 1796 since French foreign policy withdrew its support for the revolutionaries. The contributions of vanquished neighbours were more important to France than allied republics not supported by the population.

Unrest usually broke out not against a prince or monarch but against some specific official or mayor, against concrete grievances such as the introduction of unwanted hymnals or the liberalization of trade. Interest in the preservation of outdated traditions prevailed. Trees of liberty were planted but were later torn out.

Most of the pro-revolutionary fliers demanded reform and not violent revolution. They appealed to monarchs to introduce reforms or carry out the reforms already initiated. They did not demand the abolition of the monarchy but rather a constitution. For



Freiheitsaufruf an die hannöverischen Unterthanen.

Liebe Mitbürger! Nicht ausgelassene Neuerungssucht, sondern angetrieben durch die Noth der Dringlichkeit, schlage ich euch vor, Maßregeln der jetzigen, zur Epoche unserer Cultur gereift, einen Versuch machen wollen, den übermüthigen Thron zu stürzen, und [illegible] verschiedenen ungerechten, für die Armuth drückenden, Abgaben zu befreyen, [illegible] ; dadurch [illegible] die Wollust der Despoten durch seinen Schweiß zu unterhalten.

Im neun Jahr der französischen Freyheit von einem Hannöverer geschrieben.

④ Call to freedom of 7 November 1792 in Göttingen addressed to people of Hanover

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⑮ Planting of a tree of liberty in Speyer, 1798
Contemporary etching by J. Ruland

many, there was no conflict of interests between loyalty to their rulers and revolutionary activity. Even radical Jacobins relied on the effectiveness of reforms. Figures of the late Enlightenment in Germany such as Friedrich Christian Laukhard, Adolph Freiherr von Knigge and Georg Friedrich Rebmann supported a synthesis of republican politics and enlightened constitutional monarchy.

The threat of a revolution was now also given as a reason for the

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necessity of reform, which leading figures of the Enlightenment had preached before 1789, i.e. reforms to avoid revolution! In his treatise "Beiträge zur Berichtigung der Urteile des Publikums über die französische Revolution" (Contributions to Correct Public Attitudes to the French Revolution), published anonymously in 1793, the philosopher Fichte wrote: "There is one and only one sure means of preventing violent revolution: informing the population thoroughly of its rights and duties."

Insurrection constituted a subject of particular interest in the political theatre of the times. It was not advocated at all but rather condemned or staged to justify the necessity of reform.

Many of those who supported the French revolution were highly sceptical about the political maturity of the German people. Franz Wilhelm Jung, a friend of Hölderlin, warned about revolution in Germany in 1796 since: "we are not as good as the French and could not get back on our feet as quickly as they." In Hölderlin's drama "Der Tod des Empedokles" (The Death of Empedocles) (1797-99) freedom is not won by the people in battle but granted to them in line with the reformist ideals of the late Enlightenment, i.e. from above. Empedocles refuses to accept the crown he is being offered: "This is no longer an age of kings". The image of the people fluctuated between that of 'citizens' and that of the irresolute 'masses' and 'plebs'. Forster wrote in 1792, "I remain convinced that Germany is not ready for revolution and that it would be a terrible, dreadful mistake to incite it before its time by stubbornly insisting on the continuation of the most horrible of wars . . . Our uncouth, poor and uneducated people can only rage, but are not able to constitute". Forster therefore advocated reform from above: "Germany's position, the character of its inhabitants, the level and particularities of their education, the mixture of constitutions and legislations, in short, its physical, moral and political relations have impeded its slow and gradual perfection and maturity. It must learn from the mistakes and suffering of its neighbours and perhaps gradually attain a degree of freedom from above which others have to seize upon in a single vigorous upheaval from below."

The argument was also to be heard that Germany had already had its revolution with the Reformation in which so much blood had been spilled.

No revolution occurred in Germany because there was no revolutionary climate. Educated Germans proceeding from the Enlightenment supported government reforms and modernization. The political climate in Germany appeared in need of reform and was reformable. The bourgeoisie and the aristocracy were well-dispos-

"Landscape with a tree of liberty"
Drawing by J.W. v. Goethe, 1792

ed towards reform. As opposed to the situation in France, there was no overpowering, conservative aristocracy bent on retaining its privileges. The church in Germany, in particular the Protestant church, was more affected by the Enlightenment.

Goethe's sketch "Landschaft mit Freiheitsbaum" (Landscape with a tree of liberty) expresses the awareness of many German reformers and figures of the late Enlightenment. The allusion to new freedoms appears superfluous and the Jacobin cap seems out of place since the German landscape looks peaceful and free already.

The reformers who had to come to terms with their disappointments about the course of the revolution and about the lack of reform after 1793 endeavoured to realize their objectives following the abolition of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. The fight against Napoleon's armies gave further impetus to their activities for reform. Their model remained the early phase of the revolution and the Napoleonic reforms in the States of the Confederation of the

Napoleons

Gesetzbuch.

Einzig officielle Ausgabe für das Großherzogthum Berg.

Düsseldorf,

1810.

Code civil.
Cover of the German edition, 1810

Code civil (Code Napoleon)
First edition, 21 March 1804

Code civil
Cover of the first edition

Rhine which had left the Empire in 1806. The Code Napoléon for instance was introduced in the Grand Duchy of Berg and the Kingdom of Westphalia. It guaranteed equality before the law, freedom of the individual and his property, the independence of justice, the abolition of serfdom and general access to public office.

The reforms of Hardenberg and vom Stein gave force to these new principles in Prussia. Prussian reforms were reforms from above. Instead of revolution came the reformed and reforming, authoritarian State.

Historians now view the wave of reforms in the Napoleonic era as a greater break than the events of 1789. The reformed and modernized, authoritarian State was, nevertheless, to conflict once again with the social and political movements of the 19th century.

Napoleonic Anti-Napoleonism of these years with its political hesitancy and ambivalence formed the background for Heinrich von Kleist's historical dramas "Prinz Friedrich von Homburg" (Prince Frederick of Homburg) (1811) and "Die Hermanns-

(50) Karl August Furst von Hardenberg
Stipple engraving of 1806

(51) Karl Reichsfreiherr vom Stein
Contemporary oil painting

(52) Heinrich von Kleist
Anonymous painting

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schlacht" (The Hermann Battle) (1808). His drama "Penthesilea" (1807) which expresses the necessity of asserting one's own personality against tradition and government order also shows Kleist's attitude to the Prussian State.

In the midst of disenchantment about the course the revolution had taken and of hope for a continuous and more organic development in Germany, the revolution could be understood as the initial eruption of an even greater and more thorough upheaval, the end of which was yet to be seen. Even in France it was believed by some that the revolution was only the beginning of a future, even greater revolution. The revolution was no longer felt as an event or a break but as a long-term process of change. Rousseau had already predicted a 'siècle des révolutions'.

The vision of a German revolution to come was conceived of partially at a sociopolitical level and partially at a cultural and ethical level. For Georg Friedrich Rebmann, the French revolution was "but the beginning of a greater revolution compared to which all the others would seem like child's play." Rebmann meant sociopolitical change and was thinking in terms of "centuries".

A letter which Friedrich Hölderlin sent to his friend Johann Gottfried Ebel at the beginning of 1797 contains a vision of a totally cultural and ethical revolution. In it, Hölderlin reacted to Ebel's disappointment about the political situation in Paris. The letter was motivated by Rousseau's diagnosis of the crisis of the times and endeavoured to render this crisis in more positive terms. The contradictions and the "chaos" of the present would lead "of necessity" to a new and rejuvenated world. Our whole view of the world would alter fundamentally: "This character of a better known facet of mankind," Hölderlin wrote, "is certainly the harbinger of extraordinary things to come. I believe in a coming revolution in thinking and imagination which will cause the present to blush. And Germany can perhaps contribute substantially. The quieter a State grows, the more splendid it becomes when it matures. Germany is quiet, modest, a country of much reflection, much work and much activity in the hearts of the young without such activity transform-

ing into superficial smalltalk as it does elsewhere. Much education and much, much more! Educable material . . . You yourself have said so! From now on we should live for our fatherland . . . I do not understand why you do not come back. You are a poor man in Paris."

Hölderlin's confidence was not only based on the general chaos of the times, but on education and educability in Germany which for Hölderlin meant the heights of philosophy and art. The romantic writers Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis interpreted the French revolution in a similar fashion, as an 'incitement' (Novalis) to a future new world which they both conceived of as a new 'religion' embodying all forms of life. Friedrich Schlegel envisioned this future religion as a 'great moral revolution' to be brought about not by 'force' but by 'aesthetic education'. In his treatise "Die Christenheit oder Europa" (Christianity or Europe) (1799), Novalis studied the 'traces' and 'signals' of the past and the present from which a genuine 'teleology' of revolution and the symbols of a 'new world' could be deduced. The two of them viewed this new 'religion' embodying all forms of life as a better and more genuine foundation for a free world to come than the abstract ideas of freedom and equality or than political activity.

The Revolution of the Intellect

In his treatise "Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland" (Religion and Philosophy in Germany), published in 1834, initially in French in order to acquaint the French public with German intellectual history, Heinrich Heine compared the French revolution to German idealist philosophy. Idealism constituted a 'philosophical revolution' equivalent to the political revolution in France. Kant, he claimed, with the latter's "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" (Critique of Pure Reason) was the "great destroyer of the realm of thought" as Robespierre had been in the realm of politics.

A few years earlier, Heine had described "our German philosophy as the dream of the French revolution." The German revolu-

© Heinrich Heine
Drawing by Wilhelm Hensel, 1829

③ Johann Gottlieb Fichte
Drawing by the Henschel brothers

tion was idealism, it was a revolution of the intellect: "Thus we had a breach with the past and tradition in the realm of the intellect just as the French had had a breach in society. Our philosophical Jacobins gathered around the Critique of Pure Reason. They allowed for nothing but what the Critique would allow for." Heine compared the course of the revolution to the evolution of idealism; he compared Fichte to Napoleon, Schelling to the restoration and Hegel to the principle of constitutionality. Despite all his malicious irony, Heine was serious about the comparison. For him, German

philosophical idealism was just as significant for the history of mankind as the French revolution.

This comparison did not wait to be discovered by following generations. Intellectual circles in France and German contemporaries of the revolution had also had the same thoughts. Idealism was understood as a real mirror of the revolution, as the only philosophy up to the standards of the revolution. They regarded idealism as the philosophical interpretation of freedom and human rights.

Kant was seen as the founder of the philosophy of autonomy and human freedom. He himself, however, was sceptical of the pathos of autonomy.

More fitting than Heine's comparison of Kant with Robespierre would seem the comparison of Kant, the 'teacher of Königsberg' with Abbé Sieyès, the 'citizen of Fréjus'. The comparison is to be found in the preface to the writings of Abbé Sieyès by Johann Gottfried Ebel, Hölderlin's friend. In Ebel's view, the two form an "obvious chain of thought".

Fichte derived his philosophical ideas both from the French revolution and from Kant's philosophy. Just as the French nation had freed humanity from the 'external chain', Kant's philosophy had set up man as an independent being and liberated him from fear and the power of things.

With regard to the connection between idealist philosophy and revolution, it would also seem opportune to quote the letter by Louis Kerner, a young student at the Tübingen Foundation, to his father: "I do not intend to languish any longer in the gaol of this theological foundation. The time has come for all men to be free citizens of the world. I have bought a satchel in which I am going to pack Kant's writings and set off for Paris. If you oppose me, you do not understand the philosophy of our times. Vive la liberté, vive la nation."

In the early Nineties, Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling also studied at the Tübingen Foundation, an elite college of the Württemberg provincial church. Together, they showed their enthusiasm for the French revolution, for Rousseau and for Kant. "What took place in

France," one witness of the times recalled at the foundation, "was extraordinarily unique and divine." "Day and night everyone searched through Rousseau's dream of a social contract" and admired the French revolution as the "greatest victory of philosophy."

The relationship between Hegel's philosophy and the revolution has remained controversial up to the present. It has been stated

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel
Chalk drawing by Sinner

that his philosophy is "revolution right into its deepest recesses" (Joachim Ritter), but it has also been alleged that Hegel celebrated the revolution in order to get it over with (Jürgen Habermas). For Hegel, too, the revolution in idealist philosophy was "recorded in the form of thought", i.e. recorded and terminated. He interpreted the revolution as the realization of the ideal of freedom and legal equality, i.e. the coming of age of bourgeois society. Progress in history came to an end with it. All social and political realities must now be measured with this state of history.

Friedrich Schlegel's short treatise: "Die Französische Revolution, Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre und Goethes Meister . . ." (The French revolution, Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre and Goethe's Meister . . .) compared the historical significance of the revolution to that of philosophy (Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre of 1794-95) and art (Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre of 1795-96), but added that they were not terminated. Though revolution, philosophy and art

Friedrich Schlegel
Charcoal drawing by Philipp Veit, ca. 1805

appear as equal currents of the era, they do not yet constitute the final version (Fichte's Wissenschaftslehre of 1794-95).

Schlegel's short treatise and Hölderlin's formula of a "future revolution in thinking and ideas" to which Germany "can perhaps contribute substantially", point to a wide-spread awareness that the gradual, peaceful evolution of Germany would outdo the achievements of the revolution in France. Heine also held this view.

The vision of an exclusively moral and cultural revolution certainly embodies the danger that the significance and the tribulations of political life become neglected. At the same time, an attempt was made to conceive of and maintain political and cultural activities, the political achievements of the revolution and its supplementation and surpassing in ethical and cultural terms as one unit. In the course of the 19th century, this attempt was reduced to a stereotype definition of German identity: German education, German intellect against French civilization and politics. In line

© Caroline Schlegel
Painting by J.F.A. Tischbein, 1798

with this stereotype, the 'ideas of 1914' were held up against the 'ideas of 1789' as a justification for the war in 1914.

Classicism and Romanticism

Expressly or not, the experience of the revolution became a prerequisite for the aesthetic theories and great works of art of German classicism and romanticism. Authors felt historically obliged to justify the existence of art both in terms of the 'age of philosophy' (Schiller) and in terms of the revolution. Art had an answer to give to the revolution. Art as a means of attaining the unity of the individual and that of mankind in the works of Schiller, Novalis and Hölderlin reacted to fragmentation and violence in society and politics.

The declaration of the autonomy of art did not constitute a rejection of Enlightenment and politics. It was the equality of art with philosophical reason and sociopolitical activity which would enable it to exercise a humanizing social effect. Even in its autonomous, self-determining essence, art could act as an ideal and model for the self-determination of man.

This new definition of art exemplified by Friedrich Schiller in his "Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen" (On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Number of Letters, 1795), a fundamental text for the theory of aesthetics of the period. Drafted as an alternative to political revolution, it borrowed the latter's postulates of freedom, self-determination and humanity (Karl Robert Mandelkow).

This is also true of the artistic theory of romanticism, even in problems of definition. The romantic platform of a 'progressive universal poetry' (Friedrich Schlegel) is founded in the aesthetic equality of all literary elements and genres. The novel, the paradigmatic realization of this platform is a specifically modern and "free" genre (Friedrich Schlegel).

The romantic movement, too, was oriented to reform. The ideas of Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel and Jean Paul were basically in line with the early liberal constitutional phase of

the revolution. Even the conservative Joseph von Eichendorff was against a restoration of the ancien régime. He recognized the historical right of the French revolution. Schiller's attitude to the revolution, on the other hand, was unequivocally negative. In 1793, Schiller wrote to the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg: "The attempt of the people of France to attain their sacred human rights and achieve political freedom simply made evident the inability

Friedrich Schiller *Oil painting on canvass by Ludovike Simanowiz, 1793*

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and lack of dignity thereof and has thrown back not only this poor nation, but with it a substantial part of Europe, into barbarism and serfdom of many centuries ago."

The French revolution was a precipitous and premature attempt to realize 'sacred human rights'. Since the moral character of man was not yet developed enough, the political revolution could not reduce fragmentation in society, but rather helped deepen it. One of the 'Aesthetic Letters' states, "the moral alternative is missing and the munificent moment encounters a sterile sex."

Under existing social conditions, Schiller only had confidence in aesthetic experience to liberate man in the fullness of his character. Only aesthetic experience or the aesthetic condition as a field beyond politics could ennoble the character of man, at least under the yoke of a 'barbaric system of government' such as absolutism. 'All improvements in political life' must arise from such an ennobling of human character. First the citizen, then the constitution!

Man is to regain his integrity and freedom in this aesthetic condition. This freedom, however, does not yet signify political freedom, it simply facilitates political freedom. Thus something infinite is attained. In aesthetic culture, man has attained nothing more than 'the natural ability to be able to turn into whatever he wants. The freedom to be what he wants to be has been returned to him completely."

Schiller called the aesthetic condition the "second creator" of mankind. It is thus no coincidence that he alludes to the claim laid by the revolution of being a new 'creation'.

Goethe regarded this claim as an excessive demand on the aesthetic element and as aesthetic Jacobinism. In his "Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten" (Conversations of German Emigrants) which appeared in the journal 'Horen' in close connection with Schiller's letters, aesthetic experience refers to the natural and historical conditions of man. An aesthetic condition beyond and above social and historical relations must of necessity be questioned.

Schiller's dramas after 1789: "Wallenstein", "Maria Stuart",

"Die Jungfrau von Orléans" (The Maid of Orleans) and "Die Braut von Messina" (The Bride of Messina) betray a profound historical pessimism. The ideals of the active individual fail completely due to the reality of power politics.

"Wilhelm Tell" (William Tell) is the only exception. In this play, Schiller is most obvious in his treatment of the revolution and in his selection of the Tell material which itself entered the realms of the mythological during the French revolution. The Rütli Oath of the Confederates alludes to the Assemblée nationale in 1789. The Third Tier declares itself to be a nation, the aristocracy is excluded. The oath makes the Swiss "one nation of brothers". The scene ends "with the sun rising over the snowy mountains" – an allusion to the mythe solaire of the revolution. The storming of the castles and the dancing in the ruins allude to the storming of the Bastille. And the call for old freedoms: "We want to be free as our forefathers were."

Wilhelm Tell

Schauspiel

von

Schiller.

Zum Neujahrsgeschenk

auf 1805.

Tübingen,

in der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung.

1804.

Friedrich Schiller: "Wilhelm Tell" (William Tell) *Cover of the first edition, Tübingen 1804*

mirrors the original demands of 1789. In the play this call is linked to expectations of "new and better freedom". It does not, however, contain a belated justification of the French revolution. On the contrary, Schiller presents a model of a revolution as it should be. It is carried out by a people at one with nature, by nature itself which "blossoms" in the ruins:

"The outdated crumbles, times are changing
and new life is blossoming in the ruins."

William Tell is no political activist. His deed is that of an outraged father.

Goethe's monumental novel "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre" (William Master's Years of Apprenticeship, 1795-96) also contains a reaction to the French revolution. Compared to this work, all of his previous satirical comedies against the revolution are but abortive attempts to expose the revolution to ridicule.

The novel differs from its early form, "Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung" (William Master's Theatrical Mission, 1777-85) like a "post-revolutionary building from the pre-revolutionary groundplan" (K. R. Mandelkow). The novel presupposes the definite end of pre-revolutionary feudalism and the beginning of the bourgeois era. Bourgeois and aristocratic values enter new phase of life epitomized in the conclusion by the alliance between the aristocratic Natalie and the bourgeois William. This perspective comes even more conspicously to the fore in the continuation: "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden" (William Master's Years of Wandering or the Relinquishers, 1821-29). The social utopia of this novel is oriented to America.

The drama "Die natürliche Tochter" (The natural daughter, 1807) also ends with the alliance between an aristocrat and a bourgeois in which the political forces, the ancien régime, the plotting of the aristocrats and the menace of a national revolution are all criticized equally. Social effectiveness arises from an individual, familiar deed. From the viewpoint of late representative of the German Enlightenment, the "force of the masses" of which Forster spoke does not occur.

© Goethe and Napoleon
Wood engraving by A. Roessler

Goethe, who was certainly no advocate of the revolution, gave no support to the feudal restoration. He recognized Napoleon whom he met in Jena in 1806 as a character of significance in world history.

Goethe did, however, retain a certain sceptical distance from the new age of the bourgeoisie. He was not silent as to the price to be paid for progress. No conflict in William Master is solved, no reconciliation is brought about without complications. The harper and Mignon, the romantic characters, fail amidst the plans of the tower society, and with them the directness of a poetry created in suffering. Suffering and death are repressed in the Years of Wandering.

"Faust. Die Tragödie zweiter Teil" (Faust. The Tragedy, Second Part, 1832) also takes place at the end of the ancien régime. A setoff occurs here too: the vision which bedazzles Faust, a free people of equals on free land, veils the murder of Philemon and Baucis, which he instigated. The era of the bourgeoisie takes the guilt.

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More than anyone else Friedrich Hölderlin utilized for his poetry and his aesthetic theory his awareness of living at the turn of an era similar to the turn between classical antiquity and the Christian era.

The historical crisis of revolution is also reflected in his theory of poetic genres. He regards tragedy as the highest genre since it portrays most directly the tragic transition from one era to the next.

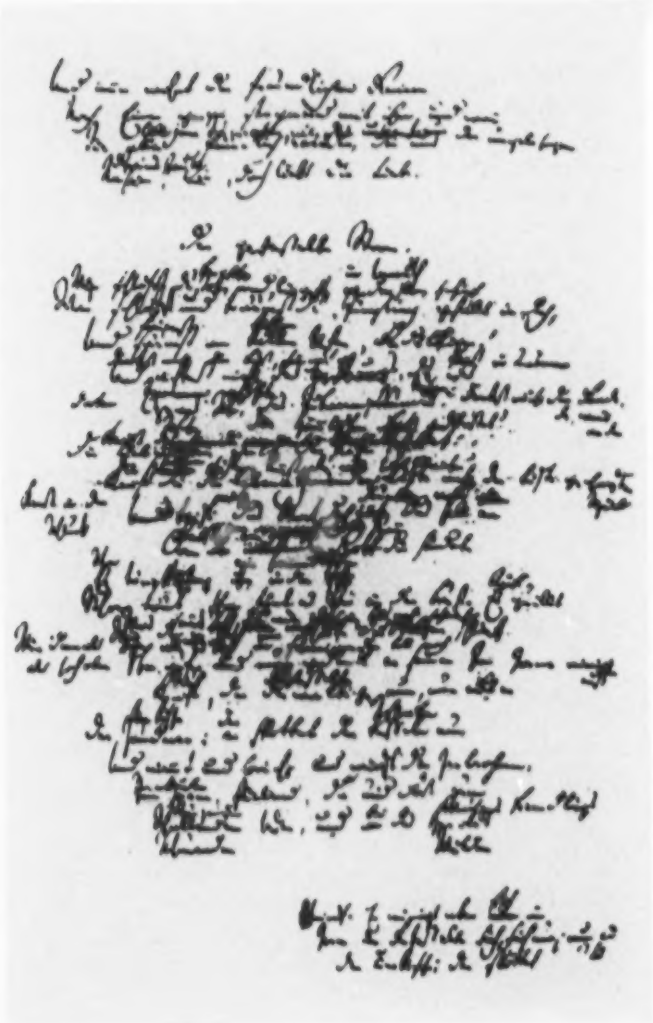
Hölderlin regarded the revolution as more of a turn of an era than a political event. His ideal of a republican and liberal society did not exclude constitutional monarchy as a transitional form of government. The separation of powers and liberalism were to characterize the principles on which the State was founded.

His late "Pindar-Fragmente" (Pindar Fragments, 1803) portrayed the course of history as a road from a 'more royal' to a 'more general' form, i.e. public and democratic 'destiny' with the citizen being seen as the successor to the 'monarch'.

Hölderlin conveyed his awareness of a transition of eras from his youthful poetry in Tübingen, which expressed his enthusiasm for the revolution, to his great verse after 1800. Just as Schiller had, Hölderlin ascribes an unprecedented unifying force to aesthetic experience. In the critical period of transition, poetry was to provide stability by providing reference to the direction history takes and by creating and maintaining continuity by stimulating memory. To this extent, historically and philosophically speaking, poetry is to be found at the heart of the crisis: "Poets have usually arisen at the beginning or at the end of an era." Poetry either precedes the turn of an era prophetically (this is how he understood Rousseau's role) or it follows it as its 'conscience' as its interpretation. This is how he viewed his own poetry.

The 'singer' equates with the 'hero', just as poetic interpretation equates with political activity. The singer maintains and clarifies the 'spirit' of the hero, as stated in the poem "Buonaparte".

Hölderlin encompassed his poetic identity in the ode "Dichterberuf" (The Poet's Vocation, 1801). The poet is committed to the 'sublime', the divine quintessence of history and nature. But he is also to awaken the nations as an 'angel of the day'. He takes his



⑪ Holderlin: "Der gefesselte Strom" (The manacled stream) *Manuscript*

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Friedrich Hölderlin *Pastel by Hiemer*

inspiration from the 'prophets of the orient', 'Greek hymns' and 'thunder'. This 'thunder' refers to the revolution and revolutionary wars:

THE POET'S VOCATION

The banks of the Ganges heard how the god of joy
  Was hailed when conquering all from far Indus came
    The youthful Bacchus, and with holy
      Wine from their drowsiness woke the peoples.

And you, our own day's angel, do not awake
  Those drowsing still? O give us the laws, and give
    Us life. You, Master, triumph! Only
      You, like that god, have the right to conquer.

Not that which else is human kind's care and skill
  Both in the house and under the open sky
    When, nobler than wild beasts, men work to
      Fend, to provide for themselves – to poets

A different task and calling have been assigned.
  The Highest, he it is whom alone we serve,
    So that more closely, ever newly
      Sung, he will meet with a friendly echo.

And yet, you heavenly powers, you all, and all
  You fountains, all you banks and you groves and peaks
    Where marvellous at first when by the
      Forelock you seized us, and unforeseen the

Divine, creative Genius came over us,
  Dumbfounding mind and sense, unforgettably,
    And left us as though struck by lightning
      Down to our bones that were still aquiver.

You restless deeds at large in a boundless world!
  You fateful days, you sweeping ones, when the God
    Drives calmly pondering where, drunk with
      Rage, the gigantic horses take him –

Of you should we keep silent, and when in us
  Euphonious peals the constant, the quiet year,
    Then should it sound as through capricious,
      Curious, a child had been idly twanging

The Master's lyre, the hallowed, the pure, in jest?
  And for that only, poet, you heard the East's
    Great prophets, heard Greek song, and lately
      Heard divine thunder ring out – to make a

Vile trade of it, exploiting the Spirit, presume
  On his kind presence, mocking him, heartlessly
    Deny the simple one and drive him
      Round like a captured wild beast for pennies?

. . .

Hölderlin later checked his original enthusiasm for the French revolution to bring it into line with social and political realities. In contrast to a direct realization of virtue attainable only by terror, Hölderlin advanced a counter-model in his novel 'Hyperion', that of educating the people in an enlightened tradition. Terrorist violence is here contradicted by 'love'. Hölderlin eloquently dedicates his novel to the "love of the Germans".

Hölderlin's experience with the course the revolution took resulted on the one hand in an interpretation thereof from the perspective of world history and on the other hand in reconcentration of his attention on Germany. This signifies by no means a turn to nationalism. The essence is the proper interpretation of that which 'exists' historically, which of necessity includes the evolution thereof. In this interpretation of western history lies the function of what he assonantly referred to and interpreted as "German song" ('Patmos').

In his later years, Hölderlin stressed the necessity of "laws and inherited codes" provided they were in a form "in which man and God could meet". They were not, however, to be seen as absolutes with respect to "living relations". The unifying force of art is qualified here. Laws and inherited codes "bind living relations more tightly than art, relations in which, with the passing of time, a people will have come to meet and recognize itself." It is not the term 'king' which is recognized as the 'sublime power' but these laws and outdated codes.

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